

*The District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency
Testimony*

*Prepared for Presentation to The Committee on Human Services
Council of the District of Columbia*

March 26, 2001

Good morning Councilmember Allen and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Sondra Jackson and I am the court-appointed Interim General Receiver for the Child and Family Services Agency. I have served in the capacity of Interim General Receiver since December 2000. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Child and Family Services Agency's Fiscal Year 2002 budget request.

The Fiscal Year 2002 Budget Overview

This is the fourth operating budget that has been presented to the Council by this particular Receivership. This budget is formulated on this Agency's expenditures in Fiscal Year 1999 (\$149,547,368), Fiscal Year 2000 (\$147,414,512) which was considered a maintenance budget, and Fiscal Year 2001 (\$185,751,787) which has been properly labeled as a compliance budget. The budget being submitted for Fiscal Year 2002 is appropriately labeled as a transition budget, designed to move the Child and Family Services Agency from Receivership back to the control of the city government. The Agency's proposed 2002 budget is a balanced budget

projecting \$189,842,520 in spending. The proposed budget represents a 27% increase over the 1999 budget and a 2.2% increase over the 2001 budget. The proposed increases represent additional dollars needed to meet the specific requirements of the October 23, 2000 Consent Order that sets forth transition requirements. Please see Charts 1 and 2 for comparisons of the FY 2001 and FY 2002 budget requests.

As you are aware, Chairperson Allen, we recently provide the Committee with additional information on our Fiscal Year 2002 proposed spending plan. As stated in that transmittal, the Child and Family Services Agency is requesting an additional 255 full-time equivalent positions in FY 2002 to accommodate the transfer of 217 positions from the LaShawn Receivership and 38 positions to comply with the October 23rd Consent Order.

Assessing FY 2001

Chairperson Allen, before I discuss the Agency's FY 2002 budget request in more detail, I would like to provide the Committee with a brief overview of where the Agency is in improving service delivery to children and families in the District of Columbia. As you are well aware, the child welfare system in the District of Columbia has been under tremendous scrutiny for some time now. However, the challenges faced in the District

of Columbia are not unlike those faced by most child welfare systems across the nation. Trained professional social workers serve our most vulnerable population of children and families under incredible systemic conditions. As these workers strive to protect children from further maltreatment; place children in nurturing and loving foster and adoptive homes; keep children safely in their own homes; and reunite some families, they face awesome responsibilities. The dedication and commitment of over 300 social workers serving more than 9,000 children in the District of Columbia should be applauded.

When I spoke to this Committee on March 5th, I provided you with information about some of the services and programs that the Agency has implemented, as well as current initiatives underway. You will recall that I referenced our DC KIDS program, the comprehensive health system for children in foster care; the Agency's implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act; the implementation of our automated computer system, FACES; the accomplishments of our neighborhood-based service delivery system; and the status of the Agency's human resources and staffing efforts. We are making progress in each of these areas, and continue to make refinements where needed.

Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Neighborhood Collaboratives

More than 90% of CFSA's caseloads originate from the neighborhoods served by the Collaboratives. The Collaboratives are located in communities with high levels of at risk families. All Collaboratives share the basic goal of building healthier, stronger families and neighborhoods. Expanding family preservation and supportive services in the community is critical to achieving compliance with the Adoptions and Safe Families Act, regardless of whether a child resides in the home, with a relative, with an adoptive parent, or in foster care.

The Collaboratives are the means through which the Agency provides prevention child welfare services. Community cases (prevention cases) continue to increase and as a result of our current performance based budget contracts, we have developed the necessary mechanisms to ensure accountability. Oversight and technical assistance is provided through the Community Services Administration.

Inter-Agency Initiatives

The Agency continues to work to achieve greater inter-agency cooperation between CFSA and the D.C. Superior Court, Corporation Counsel, and the Metropolitan Police Department in fulfilling the mandates of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act. In addition, CFSA has initiated

memoranda of understanding and issued requests for proposals to improve the Agency's ability to ensure mental health and substance services to the children and families currently served by the child welfare system. In this regard, CFSA has worked very closely with the Commission on Mental Health Services and the Addiction Prevention Recovery Administration to expedite this process. As a result of those discussions the Agency has also made funding available to ensure that our clients receive specialized treatment and services through programs administered by those agencies.

CFSA cannot provide adequate services to children and families without effective partnerships with the Courts, private agencies, and community-based programs. Experience has already demonstrated that mental health and substance abuse treatment, are integral components of service delivery and family rehabilitation.

Staffing/Recruitment and Retention

Appropriate staffing levels continue to be a major concern. CFSA submitted a recruitment and retention compensation incentive package to the Mayor that included a hiring bonus and an additional income allowance designed primarily as a retention incentive. The Mayor and the D.C. Council have approved this incentive package on an emergency basis. CFSA has implemented other compensation incentive programs. An

employee referral program and a program to reimburse new hires for relocation expenses are designed to enhance recruitment and to recognize employee contributions in the hiring of social workers. The Agency's recruitment plan envisions the hiring of an additional 50 new social workers who will be graduating this Spring from social work programs. In addition, CFSA continues to recruit and hire individuals with bachelor-level degrees in social work to augment the caseload responsibilities of existing workers. It is anticipated that prior to the end of this fiscal year new tangible programs proposed by our retention committee will positively impact our recruitment and retention needs.

Legal Representation

A major challenge the Agency has experienced in retaining qualified social workers has been the absence of adequate legal preparation and representation in court hearings. To address this particular area of concern, and to improve the Agency's working relationship with the D.C. Superior Court in achieving compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the Agency is transferring \$1 million to the Office of the Corporation Counsel for the hiring of additional attorneys and paralegal staff to be co-located within CFSA. It is the Agency's expectation that adequate funding will be

provided to the Office of Corporation Counsel in future years to achieve adequate legal representation.

Update on CFSA's Role in the Transition

At the Committee's March 5th Oversight Hearing, I discussed the status of the Agency's transition plans. Therefore, I will not go into a great deal of detail today about those timeframes. However, I would like to provide the Committee with a brief overview about the transition as it begins deliberations on the Agency's FY 2002 budget request.

Under the terms of a Federal Court Order entered on October 23, 2000, there are four (4) requirements that must be fulfilled before the LaShawn Receivership will terminate. The first requirement includes passage of legislation creating a separate department with independent personnel and procurement authority, licensing responsibility for child welfare related facilities, and consolidation of the abuse and neglect case responsibility in the new department. Second, the District must promulgate licensing regulations for both group and foster homes, and maintain Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) responsibility for children currently in the care of CFSA. Third, the District must hire a Director of the new department. Finally, the Director must assemble a management team for the new Department. CFSA has been working very

closely with the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth and Families to satisfy these transition requirements so that the Receivership will end this Spring.

Fiscal Year 2002 Budget Request

As I mentioned earlier, for FY 2000 we were focused on improving services to our clients. The budget requested for FY 2001 was developed to bring the Agency into compliance with the requirements in the Modified Final Order (MFO). We have continued to focus our attention on those areas where we have not achieved compliance. Most of the remaining requirements pertain to additional direct services and staffing and caseload ratios. The four “decision packages” that are above our 2001 baseline budget are summarized in Chart #3. The initiatives associated with these packages are:

- The transfer of responsibility and authority for child abuse cases from the Court Social Services unit of D.C. Superior Court to CFSA as required by the Consent Order at #1, page 1. The cost in Fiscal Year 2002 is budgeted at \$1,811,515.
- The transfer of responsibility for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Office from the Department of Human Services to CFSA, as required by the Consent Order at #2, page 2. The amount budgeted for this function is \$338,581.

- The implementation of the Agency's newly created responsibility for licensing foster and group homes for neglected and/or abused children as required by the Consent Order at #1, page 2. The amount budgeted for this function is \$406,696.
- The increase in foster parent board rate payments as required by the Consent Order at #7.b, page 3. The amount budgeted for this increase is \$667,770.
- And finally, the cost for additional space for the 63 FTE's required for initiatives cited above. This number includes the cost of housing the 25 staff from Court Social Services. The amount budgeted for this increase is \$782,438.

The cost of the first three initiatives in addition to the increased space cost is the fiscal impact resulting from the October 23rd Consent Order and the implementation of the "Child and Family Agency Establishment Act of 2000." These costs are consistent with financial impact statement developed by the District's Chief Financial Officer, dated December 1, 2000.

Spending Priorities: Fiscal Year 2002

It is anticipated in 2002 that all of the new initiatives secured in 2001 will be operational and that subsequent services will be delivered to our constituents. The Agency's priority in Fiscal Year 2002 is to have in place

the resources necessary to provide a quality state-of-the-art practice and service delivery capability to the children and families of the District of Columbia. This priority is reflected in the following specific program activities:

- **Mental Health Services** -- We are required by the MFO and good-practice principles to provide mental health services to prevent abuse and neglect, to avoid placement disruption, and to help children recover from the trauma of abuse and/or neglect and family disintegration. The FY 2002 proposed budget for these services is \$4.7 million.
- **Substance Abuse Services** -- Substance abuse is a major factor in a large percentage of the cases that come to our attention. Local services – both in-patient and out-patient have historically been inadequate. Our FY 2002 budget request for these services is \$2.4 million.
- **Kinship Care Guardianship** – The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) recognized placement with kin as a desirable permanency goal for foster care children for whom reunification is not a viable option. The recently implemented guardianship subsidy for kinship providers will provide the resources frequently needed to make such permanency goal a reality. The proposed FY 2002 budget request for kinship subsidy is \$3.7 million.

- Local Resources for Children Returning from Out-of-State Care -- A primary objective of the MFO is the return of children in placements in excess of 100 miles from the District. The successful return of these children is usually contingent on the availability of specialized local placement resources. The FY 2002 budget request includes \$6.7 million for these services.

- Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Parents -- The heart and soul of a successful child welfare system is its ability to recruit foster and adoptive parents. CFSA will continue to implement an aggressive recruitment campaign with particular emphasis on recruitment within the District. The FY 2002 budget request includes \$1 million for these activities.

- Staff Recruitment and Training – To meet MFO staffing ratios and to provide quality service to our children and families, successful staff recruitment and retention programs must be created and maintained. The FY 2002 budget request includes \$1.6 million.

Building on Improvements

To build on the improvements made in the District of Columbia's child welfare system, particularly as we begin the transition back into the District government, I believe that in FY 2002 energies must be focused primarily in six areas:

- Forging a continuing partnership with the D.C. Superior Court and the Office of Corporation Counsel, and advocating for adequate resources for each.
- Creating a stable a stable work force of well-trained, well-supervised staff with manageable caseloads, and employing best practice approaches to working with difficult children and families.
- Partnering with private agencies and community-based collaboratives with an increased focus on performance and outcomes to support the goals of the Agency.
- Establishing an adequate pool of foster and adoptive parents.
- Developing a sufficient quantity of treatment services for families and children in the child welfare system.
- Improving upon the Agency's automated system, FACES, to generate reliable and accurate data and information on our client population.

Conclusion

Chairperson Allen, I have presented the Committee with a budget that will enable the Agency to increase compliance with the MFO and make a smooth transition into the District government. While we may not achieve compliance in every area immediately, this budget will go a long way toward ensuring major inroads have been made in all areas.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this Committee. I ask for your continued support in the Agency's efforts to achieve compliance with the requirements of the MFO and satisfying the conditions necessary to return this Agency to the District government. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.